

INTRODUCTION TO THE
HINDU - WEDDING CEREMONY
AND
THE VEDIC RITUAL
WITH ITS SIGNIFICANCE

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—Prof. Dr. S. G. Desai

A critical survey of the forms of marriage according to the Hindu religious scriptures is very interesting and important from the sociological point of view. The Hindus do not consider that the marriage is merely a legal contract between the man and the woman. The marriage on the other hand is one of the sixteen purificatory sacred rites a Hindu undergoes right from his birth upto the completion of his life. There are four stages of life which are prescribed by the Hindu scriptures. They are, as follows : - 1) The Brahmacharyāshrama or the life of a student 2) The Gr̥hasthāshrama or the house-holder's life 3) The Vānaprasthāshrama or the life of a house-holder retired into a forest 4) The Sannyāsāshrama or the life of renunciation. Out of all these four, the life of a Gr̥hastha is praised as the most important to the society, because the persons in the other three stages of life depend upon a house-holder only for their living. The marriage is thus considered to be the beginning of a responsible life. It is not meant for the satisfaction of merely the sexual desires. It is a sacred vow taken in the presence of the holy sacrificial fire. It is a religious binding to be observed throughout the life. It is a life-long friendship. It is a lesson to the couple in giving company to each other in pleasure and pain for all the time. Hindus believe in developing a permanent bond of love after marriage and not the idea of love before marriage. One of the main aims as usual of marriage, according to the Hindu scriptures, is to beget virtuous

children for the prolonging of the line of the family. The different prayers sung by the bride and the bride-groom in the marriage ritual, have a repeated reference to obtaining of brave sons. That is intended for ensuring the protection of the nation. Such is the sacred and the noble principle underlying the marriage as a religious rite. The bride and the bride-groom take a vow of leading the married life, with the sense of tolerance and adjustment, caring very much for the sentiments of each other. That is why there arises no question of the problem of divorce, bound as the wife and the husband are by the vow of eternal adjustment, taken according to the religious injunctions. There are eight recognised forms of Hindu marriage. We are here concerned in knowing in brief the significance of Brāhma type of marriage which is the best one. The Hindus belong to one or the other of the four main castes - i.e. Brāhmaṇa, Kshatriya, Vaishya and the Shūdra. We are restricting ourselves to the marriage ritual of the Brahmins only, in this brief survey.

Do you wish to know how a Hindu marriage is settled ? Then let us look into the details thereof.

Before we proceed some names often referred to in this article are being explained. The bride is called Vadhū and bride-groom is called Vara. The father of the bride is called Vadhū-pitā and her mother is called Vadhū-mātā. Similarly the father of the bride-groom is called Vara-pitā and his mother is called Vara-mātā. The maternal Uncle is called Mātula in Sanskrit.

When the daughter is to be married, her father collectes the detailed information of the youth who is to be approached, for further details. The first thing that must tally is the horoscopes of Vadhū and Vara. The main points which should match are the Gaṇa, Gotra and Nādi. Every Hindu Brahmin belongs to one

or the other Gotra which is named as Atri, Kapi, Gārgya etc. It is the extension of the family of an ancient Indian sage of that name. Some special characteristics are supposed to have come down in the followers of that Gotra. The Hindu callendar (The Panchāṅga) gives a list of Gotras that match each other and those which do not match, as per the surnames of the different Brahmin families. The horoscope is diagram showing the position of the planets the moon, mars etc. in the sky at the time of the birth of person concerned. An orthodox Hindu believes that the planets have a powerful influence on the life of a man. There are thirty six points (Gūṇas) which are to be considered while matching the horoscope of Vadhū and Vara. If minimum eighteen Gūṇas tally the horoscopes are normally said to be matching. The concept of Nāḍī is something like that of the modern blood-group system. However no research has been done in this regard. Vadhū and Vara should not have normally the same Nāḍī. There are three Nāḍīs - Ādya, Madhya and Antya. There are three Gāṇas - Dev, Rākshasa and Manushya. The tallying of the horoscopes thus ensures that, from the point of view of temperament and genetics as well as the future course of life, Vadhū and Vara will be suitable to each other.

When the horoscopes tally then a meeting is arranged in the house of Vara or Vadhū, in which the elderly persons from both the sides see the Vadhū and Vara and allow them to discuss their likes and dislikes. When Vadhū and Vara like each other the marriage is settled and a suitable Muhūrta that is an auspicious time for the marriage ceremony is settled as per the guidance of an astrologer.

The busy interval :

Since, that day, both the sides are busy in one or the other thing. They get the invitation cards printed according to their choice. Suitable presents are being selected not only for the Vara but even for his close relatives by Vadhū-pitā. The Vara-pitā also purchases some selected things to be presented to the elderly relatives of Vadhū. On one auspicious day later on, the ceremony of engagement of the Vadhū and Vara is celebrated when Vara and Vadhū present the engagement-ring to each other.

Before the marriage-day the relatives and friends are Vara and Vadhū respectively, invite their family members for a lunch party (Kelvan) which is meant to express congratulations and for giving some gifts. On a suitable day or the eve of the marriage ceremony Vara-pitā invites the relatives of Vadhū for a goodwill lunch. Orthodox Hindu parents do not take meals in the house of Vara after that, till the daughter begets a son.

Then dawns the auspicious day of the marriage ceremony. All the persons assemble early in the morning in the marriage hall. In the past the marriage-ritual was planned to be performed in a week or even a long period of fifteen days. All that, is now covered in only one day. The original purpose of some of the religious rites, has therefore gone into the background. The marriage meals, the reception given in the evening and many other conventions meant for pomp and show, though not prescribed by the scriptures, have assumed greater importance. Only a few enlightened seekers after the true meaning of the religious prayers recited on the occasion of the marriage ceremony - are interested in knowing the marriage-ritual in detail. It will be a very long narration if all the Mantras (Spells)

are to be explained. I shall therefore try to explain only the basic principles underlying the different acts in the ritual in the order they are performed.

Muṇḍāvalī : The foreheads a Vadhū and Vara are adorned with the garlands of flowers or pearls. These are called Muṇḍāvalī and are to be worn by Vadhū and Vara till the completion of marriage-ceremony.

The Hindu scriptures regard the bettlenut and the coconut as sacred fruits. Therefore these are given as a token of honour to the persons to be respected. The bettlenut is also used as a symbol of God Gaṇesha to be worshipped on different occasions. The turmeric called Haridrā in Sanskrit is used in many rites. It is well-known that the turmeric is purifying in its effect and so it is used in sacred rites. Its mythological meaning however is, the one that pleases God Hari i.e. God Viṣṇu. **Saffron or the red lead** is also used in common worship. Every act begins with the adorations to god Gaṇesha who removes away all the obstacles from the path of his devotees. The **rice grains** called Akshatās are used on number of times in the religious acts. Akshatā means the rice grains which are full and not broken in any part. However this is not strictly followed in the modern days, and broken rice grains are also used that Akshatās. The leaves of the Mango tree are also held to be auspicious and are used in some of the rites of the marriage ritual. The green colour is also supposed to be the symbol of prosperity and healthy life and so the bride wears the green sari and the green bangles enriching the beauty of her hand. The yellow colour is equally auspicious. According to the convention, the bride wears yellow coloured sari when she goes to the place of marriage. This sari is generally presented to her by her maternal uncle. The banana trees adorn the entrance of the

marriage-hall.

Suvāsinī means a lady whose husband is alive. This word has no exact translation in English and hence this special mention. In the marriage ritual of the Hindus the Suvāsinīs and the maidens only are supposed to take part. The sisters of the Vadhū and Vara stand behind them, holding a cocount placed on a pot when so asked by the priest. They also hold an auspicious burning lamp placed in a Cane basket and stand behind of Vadhū-Vara at the time of Maṅgalāshṭaka. In the past, the sister of Vadhū called Karavālī used to accompany her to her new home after a marriage-ceremony completed.

When the Vara is welcomed by Vadhū-pitā in the marriage hall, he is given some presents. According to the tradition, many varieties of sweets and other things are kept for exhibition in the marriage hall. The members of the family of Vadhū make this exhibition of gifts called "Rukhavata", as attractive as possible.

The convention also speaks of the special honour given to the Vara-mātā, which is in the form of precious present along with warm water served for her use in washing her mouth.

The Vara according to the convention used to exploit the opportunity of demanding some costly present when he was invited to join the party for the marriage meals. This became possible because no one would take his food till the Vara had consented to join. However, this convention is losing its hold since it became an exacting compulsion instead of being a matter of fun and pleasure.

The order of the ritual is sometimes followed in a different sequence according to the convention followed in the sub-divisions of the Brahmins or according to the revised rules of religious performance. The order

followed by us in this article may therefore be a little bit different, though all rites described here are necessarily performed in every marriage ceremony.

Well, with this foreword, let us now begin with the description of the marriage ritual :-

Ghāṇā : This is the pounding of rice and other grains with a pestle which is decorated with ornaments. At that time the family deities are prayed in a traditional song. This is rarely done now-a-days.

1) The verbal promise by the guardians : (Vaṅgnishaya)

This is an important rite after Devaka Sthāpanā, Puṇyāhavāchana, etc. in which the guardians of the bride and the bride-groom give an oral promise for the marriage of the two. The marriage hall is divided into two parts at the time of the marriage ceremony. The rooms allotted to Vara's side and his family members, are to be considered as his residence with reference to the marriage-ritual, for the time being. The other room is reserved for Vadhū's side and her family for the time being. The Vara-pitā goes to the Vadhū-pitā to beg his daughter in marriage for his son. This religious rite shows how the religious scriptures of the Hindus have given a woman a very high place in the social set up. The customary worship of the God Ganesha and the family deities is performed by both the sides. Vara-pitā describes the geneology - (names of the great grand father, grand father and the father) of the Vara, along with his name and Gotra and says that they have come to accept Vadhū, mentioning her geneology and the Gotra concerned as the Vadhū for Vara. Vadhū-pitā then takes the formal sanction of his wife and relatives and expresses his consent by saying, "I will give her in marriage to your son" and Vara-pitā says, "I

will accept her for my son". This act of requesting and giving is done for three times for giving it a perfection.

Then the Vadhū is brought in her the own room and she is asked to sit on the left side of her father, facing the East. After the worship of Gaṇeśha and other gods, Vadhū-pitā requests Vara-pitā to take his seat and receives him. Then he takes some turmeric bits and five bettlenuts in his hand and besmeares them with sandalwood paste, flowers and rice. He then ties those things in the piece of cloth specially worn by Vara-pitā as his upper garment, pronouncing his own geneology at that time. Vara-pitā then ties the turmeric bits etc. in the cloth worn by Vadhū-pitā in the same manner. In a verse, which Vadhū-pitā recites, he will request the Vara-pitā, to identify Vadhū whom he is accepting as his daughter-in-law. Vara-pitā then replies as follows that, "Dear Vadhū-pitā, you have verbally promised your daughter in marriage to my son and after due consideration I have accepted her. May she bring us happiness." After this the priests also bless both the sides by reciting some Vedic hymns. They bless them that they will enjoy with a long peaceful and prosperous life. Here is one of the famous stanzas recited on this occasion.

" Samānī va ākūtiḥ samānā hrdayāni vaḥ

Samānam astu vo mano yathā vaḥ susahāsati "

"May your intentions be one. May your hearts agree in taking decisions. May you be of one mind so that your strength in union will grow." Then Vadhū-pitā takes some rice grains in a pot and invites Shachī the consort of Indra. After her supposed arrival on the scene, he duly worships her. Vadhū then prays to her, "O beautiful consort of the King of Gods, I salute you. Please grant me marriage-boons, fortune, good health and a meritorious son." After this the priests are

honoured and they bless both the sides by reciting some Vedic hymns. In these verses they praise the cow, the Soma deity, the fire, and the house. They say that the house is a real support. So one should always pray and adore his once own residence. The bride is thus indirectly taught to love her new home - The house of Vara.

2) The welcome to the bride-groom :

After the previous rite, Vara-pitā and his relatives will go back to their room and start again to go to Vadhū-pitā, for taking the Vara along with them for the performance of the marriage ceremony. Vadhū-pitā and his relatives will welcome them on the way (Sīmānta) and take them to their own home (of course in the marriage hall).

Then after the due preliminary rites and salutations to the elders, Vadhū-pitā say, "I am performing this marriage ceremony of my daughter, so that she should take to the religious and righteous way of living with her husband."

Vara-pitā will say thus in reply, "I intend to get my son married to-day, for getting myself absolved from the obligations towards the Gods and the Manes, and for the successful continuation of all the religious traditions in my house and for the prolonging of my family, by obtaining the righteously minded progeny."

This prayer gives an idea of the sacred and noble aims of Hindu marriage ritual.

3) On the day of the marriage :

Of course in the modern days, the previous act and the one, now being described take place in sequence on the same day.

The reception of the bride-groom (Madhuparka)

When Vara will reach the room, meant to be the residence of Vadhū, Vadhū-pitā will welcome him (Honey and curds mixed together are called Madhuparka which is used as a special present in this rite) Vadhū-pitā will sit facing the East in front of the Vara and offer a seat of Darbha grass called Vṣṭāra to him. He will repeat every request three times. The Vara will sit on the seat of the holy grass offered to him. Then Vadhū-pitā will offer the Vara, water for washing his feet. This water is called Pādya. The Vara after accepting it will hand it back to Vadhū-pitā who will hand it over to his wife. She will then pour that water on the feet of the Vara and the Vadhū-pitā will wash his feet. This is considered to be one of the greatest honours that is given to a Vara. Vadhū-pitā will recite the following prayer in Sanskrit at that time. It is addressed to the holy waters. The meaning of that prayers is, "O water-deities, we use you and thereby ensure the glories and splendours in this nation of ours. I am cleansing the feet of this great man, so that the limbs of persons in our nation should be strong. May the water-deities crush and burn our enemies for the protection and safety of our nation." Indeed this a very noble prayer.

A new piece of cloth is used to dry the wet feet of Vara. Vadhū-pitā will then give him water to sip. This is done three times. This is for Arghya and Āchamana. Then will follow the presentation of Madhuparka. There are prayers to be recited by Vara while seeing the Madhuparka, while stirring it with his thumb and the nameless finger (that is the finger near the smallest finger), while throwing a portion of it to the East, South, West and the North respectively, and while keeping it on the ground after sipping a part of it. In the Sanskrit

prayer, Vara will say, "May the wind be pleasant. May the rivers flow for happiness. The medicinal herbs may be the giver of sweet fruits and flowers. May the night, the moon, the mother-earth and the father-heaven be givers of happiness to us. The big trees, the Sun and the light may endow us with prosperity". Madhuparka is offered to Rudra, Āditya, all the other gods and the beings and the remaining portion is eaten by the Vara. After he has eaten that Madhuparka, Vadhū-pitā will promise the gift of a cow to him, saying three times, "Gauḥ Gauḥ Gauḥ". Gauḥ means a cow. Vara will praise the cow as the mother of Rudra gods and then will ask his father-in-law to release the cow. Vadhū-pitā will present in addition to that cow, ornaments, dress, perfumes, etc. to Vara, according to his own ability. At present instead of the cow, some money is given to the Vara as a present.

4) The Gaurīharapūjā or the worship of Shiva & his consort Gaurī by the bride :

When the Madhuparka is given as a present to the Vara, the Vadhū concentrates her mind in the worship of Shiva and his consort Gaurī (so called because of her white complexion). The Vadhū is to face the East at that time. Gaurī had performed a long penance to obtain Shiva for her husband - so goes the ancient tale. That is why Gaurī's ideal is to be kept before herself by every Vadhū who wishes to obtain the husband of her choice. She prays to Gaurī to bestow upon her the marriage boons, fortune, health and brave sons. She is to sit there only till according to the convention, she is led by her maternal uncle (that is Mātūla) to the site of marriage.

5) The act of purification of water which is to be later on used while the daughter is given

away in marriage in Kanyādāna :

Vadhū-pitā after the Madhuparka ceremony is completed, will sit to the right hand side of the Vara and keep a copper pot filled with water on the holy grass (called Darbhas). He will put grains of wheat and rice in that pot and will worship that pot. Dūrvā grass and leaves of Mango tree which are green in colour are placed on the top of that pot. Vedic hymns addressed to the holy waters are then recited by the priests. The water in that pot then gets purified. Some people worship the invitation-card (Kum-Kuma Patrikā) also on this occasion by reciting Rigveda Mantra (6.61 4.) But this is not prescribed by the scriptures.

6) The Muhūrta and the Antahpata-Dhāraṇa :

When the auspicious time approaches, the priest will arrange two heaps of rice, one to the East and one to the West. Those two heaps are at a distance of one hand only. Two Brahmins hold a piece of cloth which separates the two heaps of rice. At the middle on both the sides of that cloth a figure of Swastika is drawn with saffron. Then Vara will stand on the heap of rice towards the East. The Vadhū will then be brought there by her maternal uncle and she will stand on the other heap of rice. Vara and Vadhū are thus separated at that time by that piece of cloth called Antahpata. Both of them hold rice, joggery (Guḍa) and cumin-seed (Jeeraka) in their hands. A hymn from the Rigveda (10.85) which is popularly called the marriage-hymn (Vivāhasūkta) is recited on this occasion. In modern days however a part of this hymn is recited after the Antahpata is removed. It will take many pages to explain its contents as it is composed of forty-seven stanzas. However a brief summary will give you some idea. In this hymn the Vadhū is said to be accepted

by the Vara as a divine gift from the gods-Som, Gandharvas and the fire. The marriage procession of Sūrya the daughter of the Sun, is beautifully described in this hymn. She had started in the chariot of her mind with the canopy of the open sky above at that time. The Vadhū is expected to be freed from the ties binding her to her father's family and she is to be tied by the new ties of love to her husband's home, where she is expected to rule over the inmates including the mother-in-law as well as the sisters-in-law. Indra is requested to bestow upon her, fortune and brave sons. The Vadhū is advised to speak sweet words and keep the members in the family of her husband under her own thumb by her own ideal conduct. She is blessed that she should become an old woman in her husband's house. Any ailments which may possibly spread from the Vadhū and her relatives to the Vara and his side are kept away by the grace of gods. The priests address the assembly, "Come to this Vadhū, see her, bless her, and then go home". A wish that the Vadhū and the Vara may enjoy a long married life and live to see their grand-sons is expressed. The gods of water and that of wind, the creator and the goddess Sarasvatī are invoked to bless the couple with a psychological union.

Well, this took us long. But is it not quite appropriate to know the contents of this important hymn at least in brief? After the Brahmins have recited this hymn, the Vadhū and the Vara who are standing on the heaps of rice will recall the own family deity. They will concentrate their eyes on the Swastika diagram drawn on the cloth separating them. Then the eight auspicious verses called Mangalāshtakas are sung. These are composed with a view to bless the couple and on some occasions, as in this case, the

names of the Vadhū and the Vara and the relatives are also included in these verses as a part thereof. The different rivers in India are invoked in one of the Verses. This also has thus some geographical and purifying importance. These eight verses if sung in a sweet voice create a suitable pious atmosphere. After that, on the previously determined auspicious time (Muhūrta) the cloth separating the Vadhū and the Vara is removed. The Vadhū will put the rice etc. in her hand on the head of the Vara and garland him. The Vara will also do accordingly. The relatives and the friends present there, will also shower down rice grains on the head of the Vadhū and Vara as a token of their blessings. The musical instruments like band and Shahanaī will be played simultaneously and the pleasant din of music declares that Vadhū and Vara are married. Vadhū and Vara will then see each other as the husband and the wife respectively. The Vara will express in the Vedic stanza he will recite at that time the following wish . - He will expect Varuṇa to inspire the mind of his wife so that she should become a source of happiness to all the members in his family. Indra and sūrya are invoked for bestowing upon her the boon of brave sons and wealth respectively.

After this, the Vara will touch the middle portion of the eye-brows of the Vadhū, with the tip of a blade of the holy grass and then sip water. The Vara then sits facing the East and the bride takes her seat facing the West. The Brahmins then sing a prayer from the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (12.13) in which the glory of the home is praised. The officiating priest will then give Vadhū and Vara some rice which they will put on each other's head. This will be done three or four times. This is only a tradition.

7) Kanyādāna or giving the daughter as a gift by the Vadhū-pitā to the Vara :

Giving away his daughter with gold ornaments on her body, in marriage to the Vara is said to credit the father, with the merits of the performance of the Ashvamedha sacrifice (i.e. the horse-sacrifice). The Vadhū-pitā gives his daughter as a religious gift to the son-in-law (Jāmāta), with the intention of obtaining an eternal seat in the world of Brahman and for the elevation of his ancestors. The bride elevates by her good behaviour past twelve generations and twelve generations to follow in case of her parents and that of her husband's family. Vadhū-pitā will then touch the shoulder of his daughter and repeat the same wish and say that he is giving her away to Vara who is Vishṇu incarnate, in the presence of all. Every religious gift is made wet with water. Similarly for this act of giving away the daughter in marriage, the water which is already purified for this purpose is used. Vadhū-mātā will pour the water in a thin line on the hand of Vadhū-pitā. That water will then fall in the hand of Vara to whom the gift is given. Finally the water is collected in a pot of metal. Vadhū-pitā will say to the Vara, "Lakshmi as it were is being given to you who are Nārāyaṇa yourself. Vara will then say, "Om Swasti" - 'Let it be so'. This is done three times. He will then place his right hand on Vadhū's shoulder and say, "The God Brahmā is the donor who has given me this wealth in the form of this Vadhū. Desire has met desire. God of love indeed is really the one who gives and the one who receives in this case. "O bride, full of emotions and sentiments I am accepting you for leading the responsible married life. you are the giver of prosperity like the rains."

Then Vadhū-pitā will tell Vara, that his daughter is

given to him in marriage so that he may attain the four aims of human existence (Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha). He should fulfil his righteous desires and may be economically well off and satisfied in his life. He should make his wife a part of his own in all his efforts. Vara will then give a promise repeating his words three times, that he will never transgress the limits prescribed by the religion and will always consult his wife in every important act he will do in his life thereafter. Vara pitā will then give him a present consisting of gold and other things.

Vara in the next rite that follows will touch the right armpit of the his wife and will express a desire to beget brave sons from her, by the blessings of the seer Angiras. The priests will then sprinkle the holy water on the head of Vara and Vadhū, holding the leaves of the mango tree in their hands. They pray that the holy waters should grant the couple, physical power and prosperity in the years to come.

8) The tie of love :

Then follows the symbolic rite of tying the nuptial thread. Husband and wife will sit facing each other. The priest will wet a bundle of white thread in milk and then will tie that thread round the neck and hip of the two, invoking the god Indra at that time. Then the thread tied round the necks of both is taken out, blended into one and after besmearing it with saffron and tying turmeric bits and a piece of wool to it, the husband will tie it on the left wrist of his wife. Then the thread on the hips is taken away and the wife, will tie it on the right wrist of the husband. While tying the thread Vara will sing a prayer Rigveda (10.85.28) in which he will ask the deity presiding over Abhichāra (false pride etc.) to leave the person of his wife. When Kṛityā (the symbol

of vice) goes away from the body of his wife, she will be an ideal house-wife according to the religious faith. This thread which thus tied is called the Vivaha Kañkana (the Vivaha bandhana)

9) Putting the sacred rice on the head of each other (Akshatāropana) :

The husband will put in the handful of his wife a mixture of milk and ghee and will put some rice on it. Vadhū-pitā will accordingly put the mixture etc. in the handful of his Son-in-law and put a piece of gold above it. The handful of the wife is then held above that of the husband's and after expressing her desire, the wife will get up and put the contents in her handful on the head of her husband. The husband will do accordingly. This is repeated for two more times. The desire for glory, wealth and progeny is expressed by the wife. The husband will desire that he should develop self-sacrificing attitude, should develop righteous conduct and should obtain fame in his life. The desires expressed by both speak well of the manly and womanly longings.

The husband and the wife will then besmear each others forehead with an auspicious mark drawn with a flower dipped into the mixture of milk and ghee remaining in the pot.

10) Tying the Mañgalasūtra :

Then the husband will tie the marriage necklace consisting of black beads threaded in gold, round the neck of the wife. This necklace is called the Mañgalasūtra (or the auspicious thread) and is treated as a symbol of the husband himself, by every Hindu wife. The husband on this occasion will express his desire for living a happy life for hundred autumns in the company of his religiously wedded wife. He will then

put on additional ornaments of gold on the body of his wife. After that the priest will tie five bottle-nuts, turmeric bits etc. duly besmeared, after the worship of Ganesha and other gods, in the portion of the cloth worn by the husband and the wife as their upper garments. This knot will be untied only when all the religious rites will be complete. The priest will then tie the upper garments of the husband and wife together by one knot. This is a symbol of tying them together. Then the Vadhū-pitā and other relatives will also decorate the foreheads of the couple with rice, and bless them.

After that, the three goddesses Mahālakshmi, Pārvatī and Shachī are worshipped by the Vadhū. The husband and the wife are considered to be the incarnations of Som and Rohini on the first day of the marriage. They will therefore worship the goddess called Dākshāyaṇī on that occasion.

The husband will then catch the bride's hand and lead her to the place where the holy sacrifice is to be performed.

11) Vivāhahoma :

The husband will sit facing the East near the altar. His wife will sit to his right hand side and from the time she is brought there, she should observe the vow of silence till she is asked to speak later on. The husband will perform the worship of the fire called Yojaka on this occasion. The sacrificial fires are named differently according to their purposes. Yojaka means one who unites the two. This is a significant name.

The husband will take the wife by her right hand with the palm raised up, by his right hand and say, "O wife, you are going to be old in my company, after selecting me as your husband. So I grasp your hand

that you may obtain - all the beautiful and good things in life Bhaga, Aryamā, Savitā and Pūṣhan - these four gods have handed you to me for the performance of the householder's duties prescribed in the scriptures" (Rv. 10 85 36) Then after asking the wife to clean her hands, he will put some ghee in her handful. The brother of the bride will be asked to put some parched rice in her handful on this occasion and then the husband will pour a laddleful of ghee on the same. The husband will then stand up helped by his wife, will offer that oblation of Lājās (parched rice) in the fire. That is why this is called the Lājā-homa. The prayer he then sings is quite significant. The brother of the bride is given some gift as a token of honour generally a cap according to the convention, on this occasion, by the bride-groom.

At the time of this fire worship, the husband takes his wife by holding her right hand, around the religious fire, three times. This act is called pāṇigrahaṇa (the act of holding the hand of the bride by her husband in the presence of the holy fire). The fire is always kept to the right hand side while going round it. There is a rite in which the wife is asked to tread on a stone specially worshipped on this occasion. When the wife stands on that stone, the husband will say, "O my wife, please ascend this stone, and be quite firm as a rock by your mind. Try to endear your opponents by your good behaviour.

12) Saptapadī - The seven steps or the final seal on the marriage ritual :

There are seven heaps of rice arranged by the priest, to the North of the holy fire. The bride treads these heaps of rice with her right foot. The moment she plants her foot on first heap, the husband

recites a prayer. He says to his wife, "O my wife, you have walked one step with me. So You and I have become friends of each other. Be giver of food and behave favourably towards me. May we beget many brave sons and may they live long". At the other successive steps he requests the bride to increase his strength, to bring him wealth, bliss and happiness, to become the mother of righteous sons and to create pleasures suited to different seasons in his life. After the bride has walked the seventh step with him, he will tell her that their marriage is then confirmed. Their friendship is to last forever. Walking together these seven steps has a symbolic significance. Friendship between two persons is confirmed when those two walk seven steps in the company of each other. If these seven steps are taken in the presence of the holy fire then that friendship becomes all the more auspicious and lustrous.

After this rite of *saptapadi* (seven steps) the husband will touch the forehead of his wife with his own forehead and sprinkles the auspicious holy water in the pot kept in the North Eastern direction, on the head of the bride as well as of his own. When this fire-worship is over, the knot by which the upper garments of the husband and wife were tied together is untied and the bride breaks her silence by saying, "May my husband live hundred years and may I beget righteous progeny", when she is being shown by her husband, the stars like the north pole star, *Arundhati* and constellation of seven seers shining in the sky (Perhaps the vow of silence is observed since then by the husband in his life ¹).

13) In the house of the husband :

When the husband enters his house with his newly

wedded wife, he performs the worship of the sacrificial fire again, to fully authorise him with the position of a householder, and for pleasing the gods. He spreads the leather-seat made up of a bull's hide on the ground and asks his wife to sit on it. The wife will touch the right hand of her husband in every religious act thenceforth, to show how she is equally a party to that act. The husband then offers four oblations of ghee in the holy fire enkindled on that occasion. At that time the husband prays to Indra to grant him ten sons. He also prays, "May all the gods make our minds quite healthy and our hearts enlightened (Rv. 10. 85. 47).

After reciting this prayer, the husband will take the remaining ghee by his little finger and apply it to the bosom of his wife. Other married ladies present there, will then wave the auspicious lights around the face of the husband and the wife. Then gifts are given to the Brāhmaṇas.

14) Airiṇīdāna or giving the present of a basket made of the bamboo :

This rite is merely conventional. It is not prescribed in the scriptures. Airiṇī means the basket made of the bamboo. The bamboo is said to be the promotor of progeny. The word in Sanskrit for the bamboo and family in general is the same i.e. Vamsha. One big basket containing sixteen small baskets, containing burning lamps made of wheat flour, and some garment, is first placed on the head of the mother-in-law and then on the heads of other close relatives of the husband. This is supposed to be a great honour done to them. The parents of the bride as it were suggest to her father-in-law, that the responsibility of their daughter is thereafter transferred to the other side by performing this rite. The parents of the bride will break their fast only

after this rite is performed.

15) The wife goes to her husband's house :

After all these rites are completed in the marriage-hall the husband will take the newly wedded wife to his own residence in a great procession specially arranged for that purpose. A pot full of rice grain is kept on the threshold of the door at the entrance of the house. The newly married bride is asked to touch the pot and push it by her right foot. When rice grains in this pot spread inside the house it is supposed to be auspicious and suggestive of the future prosperity. After entering his own residence the husband will recall to his mind his family deity. Then he will worship Gaṇapati and the Goddess Lakshmi. The husband will then rename his wife if he so desires, writing that new or the old name as the case may be, with his ring on the heap of rice placed in a plate. When the bride is renamed, her new name is declared by distributing sugar or sweets to the people present there on that occasion. The Brahmins bless the couple by reciting Vedic hymns. They will say, "O you bride you will be a devoted wife forever. You will obtain fame and lustre. You will beget many sons. May you not suffer from sorrow any time in your life. Serve your husband. May he be always the drinker of Soma-juice and of righteous conduct. May you obtain righteous brave sons. Be dear to your husband as Shachi to Indra, Lakshmi to Vishnu, Pārvati to Shankara, Anasūyā to Atri, Arundhati to Vasistha and Sati to Kaushika !! (This will remind one of the advice given by Kanva to Shakuntalā at the time of her departure to her husband's house). On this occasion the husband shows the north pole star to his wife.

It is well known that a diamond shines when

polished. Similarly a man becomes lustrous when he is polished as it were by the religious ritual. The marriage is such a ritual which binds the couple by a parmanent bond of love and friendship. The marriage as a sacred rite thus helps to serve not only the individual but the social and the national good in its own way. The marriage ritual is practised in India since the last two or three thousand years without any change. Such is its enternal hold on the Indian mind. The recital of the Vedic hymns creates a pious and noble atmosphere at the time of the marriage ceremony. The smoke of the holy fire is also said to be purifying the environment in its effect and removes diseases.

May this article help the bride and the bride-groom to grasp the meaning of the prayers they will recite at the time of their marriage ceremony. May they live a successful and happy married life for years to come. May the readers of this article be inspired with a spirit of enquiry into the religious rites they perform and may they enjoy eternal bliss and happiness in their life. (This article is only a brief review of the lengthy detail of the marriage ritual.)

Aum Tat Sat

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